

TOPANGA TOWN COUNCIL

P.O. BOX 1085 ♦ TOPANGA, CA 90290 ♦ 310.455.3001 ♦ www.TopangaTownCouncil.org

November 19, 2021



CARRIE CARRIER
PRESIDENT

ALISA LAND
VICE PRESIDENT

STACY SLEDGE
SECRETARY
TREASURER

ROGER PUGLIESE
MEMBER

TAM TAYLOR
ADVISOR

JOHN WALLER
ADVISOR

Dear Los Angeles County Citizens Redistricting Commissioners,

In deciding which maps best met the CRC's own criteria, as well as our community's interests, the Topanga Town Council (TTC) carefully reviewed the CRC materials and their stated priorities for redistricting. In particular, the TTC looked at: communities of interest, compactness, equity, fairness and deviation (from the existing districts) to make our selection. To that end, we winnowed our map preferences down to two: Map B and Map D.

TWO MAPS SELECTED

The TTC feels Plan D or Plan B strikes the best balance between our mountain community neighbors, (Agoura Hills, Calabasas, and Woodland Hills) — and our closest coastal neighbors (Malibu, Pacific Palisades, and Santa Monica). We feel that Maps D and B hew much closer to what we believe provides fair representation to the many diverse residents, interests, and communities that call Los Angeles County home. We believe that these two maps strongly represent all districts' "communities of interest."

FOUR MAPS REJECTED

The other plans, which we reject (Maps A, C, E & F), either favor borders that stretch too far north or south, include communities having little or no commonality with our area, dilute current communities of interest, split cities, have little or no prior historical connection to our programs and services, or have too much of an urban influence that is not focused on, or sensitive to, a rural-mountain environment.

We also rejected Maps E and F because they were introduced too late in the process. Bringing in new maps at the 11th hour puts residents in an impossible situation. It deprives them of adequate time to consider the maps and their impact. While Maps E and F were described as "tweaks" to Map A, we found them to be different in significant ways.

In addition, we felt that Maps A, C, E and F were overly focused on a singular construct, identity affiliation, that does not necessarily reflect the dominant "communities of interest" that drive voter behaviors or concerns. We believe that diversity should be celebrated and encouraged across all districts and that ethnic groups should not be silo'ed into a handful of districts to benefit a small handful of political actors. It must be noted that ***the People's Bloc made no outreach to the Topanga Town Council at all during this process*** to gather any feedback from our community about our interests or concerns. Nor, to our knowledge, did they reach out to any other organization in Topanga to gather insights from residents. We find that troubling when they are proposing to essentially dismantle our current Third District contours. We also find it troubling that a paid consulting group is being allowed to dominate this process.

As a unique mountain-coastal area that has fought for decades to protect wildlife, waterways, air quality and all manner of endangered flora and fauna, we feel it is imperative that the redistricting process keep our Third District as close to how it is currently as possible. We are agnostic as to how the other four districts are reconfigured, but we would like it to be fair to all groups (whether defined by ethnicity, gender, orientation, or any other category) and for everyone to be treated equally. When it comes to the Third District, we must insist on its being kept whole. We have grave concerns about being squeezed into a district with too much of an urban influence, as we feel this would stifle policymaking around rural-mountain-environmental concerns and lead to the irreparable destruction of our precious and scarce natural resources.

REASONING FOR PLAN SELECTION

Topanga was first settled in 1839 and has always been a unique, historic wildland community occupying 13,000 acres within the Santa Monica Mountains. However, Topanga does not exist independently. Our neighbors of Malibu, Pacific Palisades, Santa Monica, Calabasas, Agoura Hills, and Woodland Hills have played a critical and significant role in the shaping of Topanga because of our similar interests. Topanga's

rural-mountain community of 11,100 residents is nestled in the Santa Monica Mountains in western Los Angeles County, north of the Pacific Ocean. Because of this geography, Topanga is both a mountain and coastal community. It is of critical importance to keep communities that exist within the Santa Monica Mountains and proximal to it in the same Supervisorial District so we may find solutions to common challenges, to promote continuity of service and safety, to protect shared land use, and to ensure environmental protection.

ENVIRONMENT

As an integral part of the coastal mountain range that we occupy, Topanga serves as the third largest watershed draining into the Santa Monica Bay via the Topanga Creek. As a community, we have tirelessly worked with government representatives and neighboring communities to put in place protections that serve us all like the Santa Monica Mountains Local Coastal Plan and the North Area Plan. Most of the public lands in the SMM's National Recreation Area, like our own Topanga State Park and Backbone Trail, are a reality because of volunteers, activists, and advocates working over the past four decades with common representatives to preserve and protect these wildlands for all.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Situated within a wildland urban interface (WUI), our community regularly contends with threats from wildfires, erosion, mudslides, floods, and other natural phenomena. The emergency issues faced by our mountain and coastal neighbors are as intimately intertwined as the natural surroundings. Disasters, both natural and man-caused, are part and parcel of this wildland environment, and it doesn't start or end with a single community. They affect us all and require continued, joint-cooperation and preparedness planning. The Topanga Emergency Management Task Force is, perhaps, the greatest example of 'communities of interests' integrating services and programs for the greater good of the mountain community. This task force is a partnership of designated public agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community organizations to ensure the sustainability of emergency management efforts and strategies for the Los Angeles County unincorporated area of Topanga.

TOPANGA ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

All of the local organizations below have programs that serve or rely on residents from surrounding communities.

CERT – The Topanga Certified Emergency Response Team comprises local volunteers that work closely with Malibu, Calabasas, Agoura Hills and West Hills CERT groups, both in cross-training and actual emergency response.

TOPANGA CHAMBER of COMMERCE – this nonprofit warmly welcomes business members from across the Third District. Its programs and services are intended for those businesses who are not only located in Topanga but who do business with people who live in Topanga.

CANYON SAGES SENIORS – Topanga's local senior organization, the Canyon Sages, has over 100 volunteers and members inside and outside of Topanga Canyon providing critical support to our aging community. Topanga relies upon senior programs offered in Santa Monica, Woodland Hills, Canoga Park and Calabasas to offer assistance and provide activities and meal services for our senior population.

SCHOOLS – Beyond Topanga's local LAUSD Elementary Charter School, our youth continue their middle school and high school education primarily in Malibu, Santa Monica, Pacific Palisades, Calabasas, and San Fernando Valley located public school districts. For those pursuing higher education, community colleges in Santa Monica (SMCC), and the San Fernando Valley (Pierce Community College), and public universities including UCLA and California State University in Northridge, all offer advanced education opportunities and joint community programs for students in proximity to our community.

THEATRICUM BOTANICUM – The jewel of Topanga, this nationally acclaimed, outdoor repertory theater presents Shakespearean masterpieces, classics, and contemporary plays. In addition to providing entertainment to countless residents of surrounding communities, this theater serves multiple nearby neighborhoods and cities in diverse ways, offering acting classes, jousting lessons, and all manner of enrichment for children and adults alike.

TCEP – Topanga Coalition for Emergency Preparedness is an all-volunteer organization within Topanga that activates its Emergency Operation Center during a disaster. Established in 1994, after the devastating 1993 Old Topanga/Malibu Fire, TCEP works collaboratively with various County emergency organizations and first responders to prepare, inform and educate residents in Topanga about potential disasters, and provide updated emergency information during a disaster for local and surrounding communities.

ARSON WATCH – Topanga's Arson Watch, a Los Angeles County Sheriff's program, works in tandem with the Calabasas and Malibu Arson Watch organizations during Red Flag and High Fire Hazardous conditions.

ANIMAL RESCUE/LACODACC/ERT– During a wildfire disaster, Topanga's trained and certified all-volunteer animal rescue groups (e.g. Equine Response Teams, Topanga Animal Rescue) are activated and work in harmony with the Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care & Control, and rely on SFV and Las Virgenes Valley shelters where animals must be evacuated and/or treated.

TOPANGA COMMUNITY CENTER – a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that operates as an affordable and accessible meeting and event space that serves the local community of Topanga as well as surrounding communities.

PARKS & BEACHES

The Santa Monica Mountains area is well-recognized as a community of interest by business groups who understand that the parks and public spaces, and its creeks and beaches, are a major economic engine with over 30 million visitors each year, many of whom are regularly drawn from the nearby regions of the San Fernando Valley and the greater Westside communities. Topanga State Beach is just one area beach that is visited by locals and vacationers alike.

The mountains and parklands are critical to our area, imbuing it with the rustic, bohemian flavor for which we have become known. The communities of Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Westlake, Malibu, Pacific Palisades, and Topanga reside in a unique wildland/urban interface that includes Federal and State parklands and other publicly owned open space under the umbrella of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). Topanga itself is surrounded by this parkland and offers a connection to surrounding cities via its roads and park trails. Topanga State Park is entirely within the Los Angeles city limits and is considered the world's largest wildland within the boundaries of a major city. The park is bound on the south by Pacific Palisades and Brentwood, on the west by Topanga Canyon, and on the east by Rustic Canyon.

BUSINESS - Art & Entertainment Industry - Topanga's socio-economic traits and employment are in direct alignment with cities like Malibu, Calabasas, Pacific Palisades, Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, Hollywood, Studio City and Universal City. It is estimated that 60% of Topanga's residents work in these outlying communities.

SHOPPING - ENTERTAINMENT – Given the limited shopping and entertainment opportunities within our town, Topangans rely upon stores in the surrounding communities for their day-to-day existence: groceries, clothes, supplies, services and entertainment. The San Fernando Valley and Santa Monica offers essential products and services for our residents. Many outlying area businesses have one-to-one relationships with Topanga businesses, residents, seniors, low-income residents and our volunteer organizations. The Topanga Chamber of Commerce has spent years building bridges of commerce by offering memberships within and outside the Topanga community.

MEDICAL – With no major medical facility within Topanga, residents must rely upon the medical services outside the canyon. All Level 1 trauma centers are on the westside and other types of medical facilities and care are located in the adjacent valley and Santa Monica/Westside.

CRIME & PATROL – The cities of Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Westlake Village, and Hidden Hills, are all County "contract cities" and are served as a unit by the same Sheriff's Station, Fire Stations and County Services as Topanga. Topanga is protected and served by the Lost Hills (Calabasas) Sheriff's Department and West Valley (Woodland Hills) CHP. The Topanga Town Council has worked hard to develop and maintain an effective, united working relationship with the Sheriff's Dept., CHP, and LACoFD, all of which agree that

Topanga is a difficult community to protect, given our terrain, commuter traffic, and potential disaster situation. The Town Council, with support of these agencies, has developed a Topanga Resident Access Card that enables these emergency responders to better assist local residents during a catastrophe and to provide effective and expeditious evacuation routes.

CONCLUSION

Topanga has worked long and hard to build harmonious and symbiotic relationships with its surrounding communities. Our supportive, collaborative, and united effort has for many years ensured the viability of the environmental, safety, social, and economic programs we created together. Keeping us united with our neighboring cities and unincorporated areas will give us the ability to sustain our climate-supportive policies, our commitment to excellence in education- especially as regards the arts and environmental science, our emergency preparedness planning, and our fundamental way of life. Our request to the County Redistricting Committee is to keep the mountains whole and the Third District intact.

We thank the Committee for its time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Carrie L. Carrier

Carrie Carrier

Topanga Town Council, President